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AML 2410, Section 8974

October 1, 2013

Response Paper 3, *Death of a Salesman*

*Death of a Salesman* is a play that struggles between reality and perceived reality. Willy, the main character in *Death of a Salesman* faces an internal battle of what he wants his life to be and what it actually is. Willy’s hallucinations, (or dreams as they are commonly referred to as in the play), allow him to escape situations in the present that are difficult for him. In turn he forms alternate endings to more pressing issues in his life so that he is more favorable at the end of them. Willy’s dreams, (or escapes from reality), are just one of the major issues the play features. Arthur Miller illustrates the psychological stress that pride, and yearn for societal acceptance to stimulate one’s own personal validation inflicts on society through his main character Willy.

Pride is a major stressor that is themed throughout the play *Death of a Salesman*. Miller focuses on pride because it is one of the driving forces behind Willy’s decisions in the play. Willy’s obsession with pride alludes to the pressure individuals in society incorporate in their lives to accomplish a sense of superiority in their action compared to others. Miller focuses on pride gained form financial gains because it is the kind of pride most prevalent in society. Throughout the play we can see that Willy is struggling to accept the decline in his career’s financial earnings. We first see this occur when Willy returns from work physically and mentally tired and complains to his wife, Linda that he continues to fall into dreams even while doing activities like driving. Towards the end of Act one Linda reveals that Willy’s hallucinations were a direct result from his having lost his salary and him only working for a commission. Willy is a proud man and cannot fathom the thought of not being the provider which is the societal role of a man. Willy, throughout the play, warns Biff to acquire a respectable job because Biff working as manual labor on farms and ranches and that was not a job to be proud. During the play it is apparent that Willy tries to instill the same personal pride that he has in his son Biff. This is evident when Willy explains to Biff which jobs were beneath him. Willy is determined and persistent for personal success to the point where he develops a destructive nature. Arthur Miller, through the demise of Willy, explains that being engrossed in the conquest to succeed can be the ultimate downfall because you forget what is truly important in life.

From pride the yearn for societal acceptance to stimulate one’s own personal validation arose which is another major theme in Death of a Salesman. Willy is a character that is constantly looking for self validation whether it is from himself, during his hallucinations, or from society. Miller shows that needing the approval of other is a destructive behavior. During the play Willy has a fascination if he and his sons were “well liked” by others. At one point in the play Willy blames his not being able to overcome his downfalls and shortcomings because he suspected that people did not like him. Willy even tries to find approval from the mistress he hallucinated by having her praise his sense of humor.

In conclusion, *Death of a Salesman* has many major themes that were illustrated through the psychological stress that pride, and yearn for societal acceptance to stimulate one’s own personal validation inflicts on society through his main character Willy. Throughout the play we witness these major themes shape Willy as a character and the decisions he makes. Willy faces an internal battle of what he wants his life to be and hallucinations are his escape to the life he actually wants.